

I'm sure by now you have all watched on, aghast at the machinations within Europe around the unions defence policy.

Despite the Europhiles constant rhetoric of the EU being the greatest peace project ever it has in fact become increasingly militarised since the Maastricht treaty.

Over the years the EU has built up a number of military instruments: first a rapid reaction force of up to 60,000 soldiers.

Then came the publication of the European Security Strategy and the beginning of the first military operations in 2003.

The stage had been set for deeper integration of defence. The Lisbon Treaty was the next important step on the road to an EU army.

Yet their hopes had not materialised at least not in the dimensions that Military Power EUrope had in mind.

That is because Britain blocked nearly every major initiative deemed to 'improve' Europe's military power this explains why many in Europe's foreign and military establishment are only too delighted with the Brexit result.

Take for example Elmar Brok, Chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs and a member of the same group as Fine Gael "The Brexit has its good aspects. For years Britain held us back. Now we can proceed."

Its worth noting that Ireland with its so called Lisbon 2 'neutrality' guarantees is not seen as a barrier to a deeper EU defence Strategy. If you listen to Minister Flanagan talk on the subject you can see why. Only recently he was on drivetime saying how important it was the EU spoke with one voice on matters of defence.

The myth espoused by those calling for a common defence policy is that it will make European member states safer.

But make no doubts about it, a common EU defence policy is centred on creating a federal Europe and has little to do in the way of providing safety.

Closer cooperation among Member States police forces and relevant intelligent information sharing would make Europe a safer place, but harmonisation of defence and the creation of an EU army will not.

In 2003, The European Security Strategy was highly optimistic, it stated that Europe had never been so prosperous, so secure, so free.

Then we have the very recently published post Brexit European Global Strategy which replaced the 2003 document which states “We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union.

“Our Union is under threat. Our European Project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy is being questioned. To the East, the European Security order has been violated, while terrorism and violence plague North Africa and the Middle East as well as Europe itself”

This document contains no critical reflection of EU policies and how they may have contributed to the situation.

Instead its main conclusion is that Europe needs to build up more military capabilities- “Member States need all major equipment to respond to external crises and keep Europe safe. This means having full spectrum land, air, space and maritime capabilities including strategic enablers.”

Brexit has reignited the ambitions of the Militarists.

Just 4 days after the referendum result, French Foreign Minister, Jean Marc Ayrault and German Foreign Minister, Frank Walter Steinmeier presented the paper “A strong Europe in a world of uncertainties”

This document which was described as a reaction to the Brexit vote had clearly been drafted up before and was waiting for the opportune moment to present itself. Brexit was that moment.

In it, it talks of the EU being able to employ high readiness forces and provide common financing for its operations. The EU will need to take action more often in order to manage crises that directly affect its own security.

The French and Germans didn't stop there though, No they got busy over the Summer and in September presented another paper entitled "Revitalizing CSDP" (Common Security Defence Policy)

It is not just the Franco-German alliance, the President of the European Commission is a strong proponent of an EU Army.

Prior to Brexit he said:

"Europe has lost a huge amount of respect. In foreign policy too, we are not taken seriously. A common European army would show the world that there will never again be war between EU countries. Such an army would help us to build a common foreign and security policy and allow Europe to meet its responsibilities in the world. With its own army, Europe could respond credibly to a threat to peace in a member country or in a neighbouring country of the European Union."

In September he took the initiatives proposed by the Franco-German documents and delivered them in his State of the Union speech.

"Soft Power is not enough in our increasingly dangerous neighbourhood. Europe needs to toughen up.

Nowhere is this truer than our defence policy. Europe can no longer piggy back on the military might of others or let France defend its honour in Mali. We have to take responsibility for protecting our interests and the European way of Life.

On a side note this is the same Mali that the Irish Government are considering freeing up French soldiers from as part of the solidarity clause in Lisbon. The Malian Army are carrying out human rights violations and the Malian government propped up by the French is allowing them to carry that out with impunity.

Jean Claude Juncker is seeking a military headquarters for more European operations and he also wants a military core Europe to speed up decision making processes, effectively by passing the consensus principle.

It is this consensus principle that gives smaller states like Ireland influence.

Basically Juncker wants to push ahead with the Permanent Structured Co-Operation introduced under the Lisbon Treaty. This structure has always been blocked by Britain.

He is also seeking a military budget for the military union.

Article 41 of the Lisbon Treaty forbids using the EU budget for Military expenditure. It states operating expenditure shall be charged to the union budget except for such expenditure arising from operations having military or defence implications.

Currently what they are doing is re-interpreting this in its narrowest form to only refer to military operations so as to facilitate expenditure on defence research and even military procurement.

Juncker however wants to go further, he is seeking a European Military Budget. "For European Defence to be strong, the European Defence industry needs to innovate. That is why we will propose before the end of the year a European Defence Fund to turbo boost research and innovation"

In the upcoming weeks and months this EU militarisation Agenda will continue to be pushed.

Next Thursday at the Council meeting of EU Foreign Affairs

***European Defence Union. Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee will make their recommendations for the establishment of a European Defence Union. Likely to be included will be an encouragement for member states to set-up multinational forces, devoting 2% of GDP to defence and a review of the Common Security and Defence policy. The aim is that the European Defence Union will better equip the EU to deal with the phases (prevention, management and resolution) in a crisis. (Thursday)***

In March on the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Union it is anticipated that these proposals that I have laid out today will be adopted in what is called the Bratislava Agenda.

Sinn Féin will oppose any increasing militarization and further erosion of our neutrality,

To ensure that we live in a safer and more equal world greater military expenditure is definitely not the solution, instead we need to challenge the very structures that cause poverty, food insecurity, and conflict.

Neutrality is not some attempt to abstain for international affairs and to do nothing in the face of human suffering. Blue helmet peacekeeping missions and Irish Aid are two of the most positive pillars of this state's foreign affairs over the decades. Involving Ireland and our troops in partisan conflicts will undermine the positive work that these two pillars have done for Ireland and its positive international standing around the world. A policy of positive neutrality would enhance it.

The positive neutrality we support calls for a redoubling of our efforts to focus on working with countries to implement global targets on issues such as poverty reduction, hunger, land rights, climate change, citizen participation, economic equality, and government accountability. It is progress on these fronts, rather than an increase in military spending, that will make the world a better and safer place.

Next week we will bring forward once again a bill that seeks to enshrine neutrality in the constitution.